

A LETTER

ADDRESSED TO

MINISTERS OF STATE,

Bishops, Magistrates

AND OTHERS;

Respecting the Body of Men generally Termed

METHODIST PREACHERS,

BY WHICH IS MEANT THE OLD CONNECTION,

INCLUDING ALSO THE

CLERGY of the CHURCH of ENGLAND.

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It may appear a little strange, that a Letter of the following description should be wrote by a Clergyman of the Church of England, but I have my reasons for it, and such as I esteem a sufficient justification of my conduct, and therefore I submit it to the inspection of the public.

A LETTER, &c.

THE present day may with great propriety be termed an *evil day*, when schisms and divisions, both of a civil and religious nature, abound in society, and the fore judgements of God, by reason of every species of multiplied crimes now practised among men, hang over our guilty heads. God be merciful to us, sinners; as a people, and as a nation, for our iniquities are many.

To begin then, with the body of men generally termed both by themselves and others, Methodist Preachers. it is the general custom of this body of men and has been for time past, to assemble together once in the year, sometimes at London, sometimes at Leeds, &c. in order to consult the more effectually about a *variety* of concerns; *some* of which are *best known* to themselves; for how, let me ask the impartial part of mankind, is it possible for them to be known to others, since they remain for three whole days every Conference secluded from the world by adamantine bars, where each individual Preacher, holding up his hand, with one voice they all declare before God, and that in the most solemn manner, that nothing shall be divulged that is revealed, or that shall be said. Is not this then tantamount to the most sacred oath that can possibly proceed from the mouths of mortals? But what design is hereby to be answered; who but themselves can tell.

O ye Ministers of State, how is it that ye will suffer so large a body of men to transact their annual affairs in so secret and we may say clandestine a way? Does the pure Gospel of our Redeemer require this at their hands? Is it necessary to attempt the propagation of it by means of deceit and fraud? Are the sublime doctrines and precepts it contains transformed into a compound of cunningly devised fables; and must the public Teachers of them be necessitated to plot, scheme & contrive, how, and by what means they may best palm them on the credulity of mankind. For my part,

could it in any wise be shewn, that the Apostles of old pursued a similar mode of conduct, I should be strongly inclined to think that Christianity was considered by them in the light of a Fable, well calculated to answer some vile and sinister end.

In the next place, let us view this body of men as engaged in a most serious and expensive suit with their own people, in the High Court of Chancery; which circumstance, O strange to tell! happened not long ago, in order to wrest the number of Chapels contained in the kingdom out of their hands. What was this but a most disingenuous attempt, *big with injustice and with fraud!* Were not the chapels built by the people? Do they not belong to the people? They are the undoubted property of the people? And the late Mr. Wesley sensible of this, left them in the hands of a certain number of Trustees, for the use of the people. Why then did the preachers, at least a part of them, attempt in so base a manner, to wrest them from them, and even expend so large a sum on the occasion?

Would it not have answered a more benevolent purpose to have dispersed 200*l.* and given it to the poor, out of whose pockets, a part of it at least, had gone.—But, the design of the preachers in this instance is sufficiently plain.

Not content in their humble station, supplied with every necessary of life by their people, they were aiming at arbitrary power; and like the wicked priests of the Romish Church, making hasty strides towards Lording it over the consciences of men.

Enough indeed might easily be said on this head; and various examples produced, where the haughty spirit of *some* of these preachers of righteousness, for I would gladly hope there is a difference among them, have led them to tell one male here and a female there, that except they would submit to the rules of their body, and join their Society, their salvation was dubious, if not wholly impossible. Even a celebrated preacher whose name is *DRAKE*, was pleased to term the different ranks of men and wo-

men, who often attend their public ministry, and even contribute pretty freely to their support, *the scaffolding only* to the Methodist building, which when the building was complete, would be taken down and burnt, merely because their names were not inscribed on the sacred leaves of their records.

O ye preachers of the peaceful Gospel of Jesus, ye pious followers of the Lamb, know ye what spirit ye are of! Lay your hands upon your own mouths, kiss the dust and be dumb.

In the *third* place, let us consider this body of men, as giving countenance to and encouraging a number of *raw, illiterate* young men to stand forward in public, and *boldly* attempt to guard mankind from all errors in Theology, and to lead them safely on in the heavenly paths of peace. Is this let me ask, consistent with reason? Is this according to the Gospel of Christ? Is this agreeable to the wholesome advice of St. Paul on this head? Hear him exclaim, lay hands *suddenly* on no man. Even the Deacons, a low order in the Church, were in his opinion *first* to be *proved*, then, says he, let them use the office of a Deacon *well*, being found *blameless*. Likewise also must their *Wives* be blameless, full of all good *Fruits* and all good *works*. But in the present day we behold a contrary mode of conduct adopted, and by many approved. We see a number of ignorant youths, without fear or dread, and in no wise awed by the importance of the work, stand forward and attempt to guide mankind amidst a great variety of rocks on which they are liable to split, to the regions of eternal repose. But what says Paul more on this subject? Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. And is not *Pride* the certain consequence of such a procedure? What else have we reason to expect? Issuing from it may be, a very humble station in life; at once they find themselves transformed into preachers of righteousness, and then clad in the sable hue, stiled by the honourable appellation of SIR, and exalted before a numerous audience, they quickly begin to fancy that even the Ladies admire them; the certain con-

sequence of which is *Pride*, and the worst kind of pride, that which is *Spiritual*.

I would not, however, be understood, as if my opinion was that none should preach the gospel but such whose heads have been adorned with the hands of a *pious* and *learned* Prelate: but it is my opinion, that none should preach the gospel, but such as are legally authorised, and whose abilities are known to be equal to the work; otherwise the gospel of Christ may fall into contempt, and the torrent of atheism, deism, socinianism, libertinism, and enthusiasm, burst forth in the world with *redoubled* fury.

O ye Magistrates, see to it, and especially at this time, what kind of men they are to whom ye grant your Licence to preach the Gospel. It is of vast importance to society at large, and the interest of the true church of Christ. Also let me entreat you to exert your authority to retard the hasty steps of those who are not designed by God or man for the purpose. x

Let me now take a cursory view of the moral characters of this body of men. Their doctrines I shall not attempt to explain, and it would not be well in me *rashly* to asperse the characters, of so many persons, and charge them *promiscuously* with immoral practices. The conduct however of too many individuals, is not in this respect, of the most pleasing nature.—Witness the example of one of them being once known to sell his Horse for the large sum of *Forty Pounds*, and then instantly solicit the people for money wherewith to procure another.—Witness Assistant preachers, as they are termed, obliging their younger brethren, to use their utmost exertions in the disposal of Books, by means of which a considerable profit in the course of the year has accrued, which the worthy fathers have monopolized to themselves, regardless of those who have performed the drudgery.—Witness the conduct of some of them toward *EVEN* the *wives* and *daughters* of their hospitable hosts. Gladly would I however, hope better things of *many*, or even a *principal part* of them; neither should I have noticed this circumstance, had it not been for their attempts to screen matters of this nature when

they have happened. Whatever then of this kind may have taken place in days and years that are past, let them for the future beware; otherwise the keen eyes of men will be upon them, and they will fall into disgrace.

Add to the foregoing particulars, the conduct manifested by them in the expulsion of the late ALEXANDER KILHAM. Mr. Kilham was himself one of them, but was expelled from their body, merely for his attempts to bring about a reform in what he esteemed among them *insufferable abuses*. Hear the dismal account of his expulsion in his own words.

"After I had served the Connection, says he, Twelve years, and the preachers never attempted to charge me with any thing immoral, yet they turned me out, without allowing me a single farthing to help myself with. They only gave me back what I had subscribed to the Preachers' Fund, without allowing me any interest. My wife had not received a farthing for quarterage for eight years, tho' many preachers' wives, who have two or three times her income, receive their quarterage regularly, as tho' they had not a shilling in the world. By not taking her quarterage she saved the connection Ninety-six pounds, besides what she saved in frugality and good management. And yet they turned her out of house and harbour without allowing her one shilling either to remove from Alnwick, or to begin house keeping with any where.—The first quarter we went to Manchester Mr. Rutherford wanted to make it an article in a Leaders' Meeting 'that no person should have a Ticket who circulated or read my books, heard me preach, or gave me any support.'"

O ye spiritual tyrants, (for surely your conduct towards your late brother Mr. Kilham, justifies the expression,) who assume the garb of Piety in the eyes of men, & are clad in the robe of Saints, may it please God to save me from the CRUELTY of your proceedings. May it please God also to save me from the *ways and atrocious designs* of some of your people. SOME I say, for I would gladly hope there is a *material* difference; otherwise God be merciful to us!

I now speak from proof, and affirm that some there

are in the Methodist connection, whom I consider as the *subtlest of men*.—*Men capable of almost any thing*.—Men FORMED apparently to DECEIVE, whose inward parts are VERY WICKEDNESS, of whom from fatal experience, I warn mankind to beware.

LASTLY, let us look at this body of men as attempting to beget and cherish in their people a spirit of enthusiasm, which at this moment rages exceedingly. This spirit appeared at times in the days of Mr. Wesley; witness those parts of his Journals where he mentions his people, a few of them at least, speaking of the blood of Christ trickling down their arms, and running down their throats. It was, however, pretty much discountenanced both by him and his brother, and especially his brother, who informed the late Lord Mansfield, that his only motive for continuing with the Methodists was to prevent their running into extremes. But the Wesleys are removed from the earth, and the spirit of enthusiasm now rages in some parts without control to the dishonor of all who foment and cherish it. Witness the *prayers*, the *shrieks*, the *blasphemies* that abound on every side. Witness these people imploring the Deity to give them new wind-pipes, and requiring him to behold their zeal, which sometimes occasions the pewter with astonishment and amaze, to dance on the shelves: witness the conduct of females falling into a state of frenzy, and in a moment sinking to the earth, as if about to breathe their last. Witness the terms *holy*, *praise the Lord*, *Hallelujah*, *Amen*, and the like issuing from a great variety of mouths at one time, and in one place. Witness women being sometimes seen in extremely indelicate postures, with various other matters that might easily be advanced on the subject. Is then a conduct like this to be encouraged? Some of the Methodist Preachers dislike it, and the discerning part of the people are ashamed of it.—Well they may—It is the spirit of Enthusiasm: It has its rise in the animal nature, and Satan being transformed into an Angel of light, begins to assist in the work, and easily makes the deluded people think it *assuredly* is the Holy

Ghost. But what is worse, if worse *can be*, these very persons, some of them at least when put to the proof, are found strangely deficient in those moral virtues and duties that are essential to Religion, and the ornament of the Christian profession; on which account the pure Gospel of Christ sinks into contempt, which is the end Satan desires to see answered by means like these.

It is the same spirit that prevailed in the days of *Cromwell*, both in this kingdom and Scotland. This spirit it was that caused the deluded Fanatics of that day, *peremptorily* to tell the great I AM, the supreme Ruler of the Universe, that except he would give them the victory so and so, he *no longer* should be their God. This spirit it was that occasioned that amiable young man of high birth, Lord Montrose, to be *insulted, hanged*, and quartered, and that wrought in the Scotch Divines when they so loudly inveighed against such of the people who discovered the least symptoms of grief on the occasion; terming those emotions the effects of rebel nature.—This spirit then in my opinion is to be opposed, as it appears a few degrees only removed from the strange delusion that seized the breast of Naylor in the days of Cromwell, and caused him publicly to declare that he himself was Jesus Christ. O ye pious and discerning Methodists, for *such* I trust there are, how is it ye do not check a conduct such as this? It is a reproach to your body, and serves to bring you into contempt.

But do not you, say some, admit the work of Grace on the heart? As much as any man in the world: and I pray God it may increase in the earth. But the work of grace is one thing, and the work of enthusiasm another. The two spirits are opposite to each other in their nature and in their effects. The spirit of Enthusiasm is a boisterous spirit operating in the animal frame, and fomented by Satan till it rages beyond all bounds; whereas the spirit of the Gospel is the spirit of humility, of purity, of love, and of a *sound mind*; its nature is like unto God, and its effects are lovely; Truth is found in the inward parts of him who possesses it, and dissimulation is no

more. It makes a man behave as a christian in every condition in life, whether as a husband, a wife, a parent, a child, a master, a servant, a ruler, or a subject. In short, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are venerable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, are the happy effects of it, and the only certain proof of its existence; whoever then are found to walk according to this Rule, Churchmen, Methodists, or Dissenters, mercy be on them, and on the Israel of God.

Since then you have taken the liberty of expatiating so largely on the conduct of Methodist Preachers, what have you to say respecting your brethren of the established Church? "are they in point of doctrine, and of practice, pure as the babe that's unborn, and immaculate as a sheet of white paper?" we fear not.

The clergy of the established church may, in my humble opinion; as a body of men, be divided into three several classes.

The FIRST are those who believe, what I esteem to be the pure doctrines of the Gospel, who uniformly preach them to their people, and whose lives are agreeable to the same. These doctrines are, the depravity of human nature, in all its parts; the atonement, which necessarily implies the idea of a Trinity, and the Godhead of Christ; Justification by Faith in the day of a sinner's conversion: and the work of grace on the heart; a renewal of soul in knowledge, in righteousness and true holiness, in order to our walking worthy of the gospel. These I believe to be the doctrines of the New Testament, of Jesus Christ and his Apostles. The Reformers undoubtedly considered them as such, and therefore we find them *expressly* contained in the Articles and Homilies of our Church. Those of the clergy then, who abide by these doctrines, who preach them to their people, and whose lives are agreeable to them, act consistently with their station, and have no reason in anywise to be ashamed; may it please God to increase their number.

O ye Bishops! is it not your duty to ordain men like these for the church. Men full of faith and of the holy

spirit,—humble, pious, learned, and disinterested men!—Men whose lives are an ornament to their profession, and who are without guile before God: and to countenance those already ordained of a similar description. Be assured that such men are deserving of your attention. They are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world.

The SECOND class of clergymen are those who may be considered in the light of moral men, and who teach a system of morality, and morality only, to their people.

This part of the clergy, tho' on a variety of accounts, they may be esteemed as worthy men, and useful members of society, cannot be considered as properly qualified for the stations they are in.—They are not sufficiently versed in the doctrines of their own church, they do not preach them to their people: it may be they oppose them; consequently can have no just claim to the sacred office they have so precipitately assumed. The moral part of the clergy may perhaps be offended with me, for uttering assertions like these, but my sentiments are such, and I esteem it my duty to divulge them: It is not, however, my design in anywise to affront them

The THIRD description of clergymen, are those, who, tho' their doctrines may be moral, are often reduced to the sad necessity of telling their people to do as they say, and not as they do. Of this description, sad necessity compels me to say, there are too many. Alas, alas! a wicked priest! a drunkard, a blasphemer, a prophaner of the Lord's holy day, a gambler, a debauchee!—what a character! such priests are not only a dishonour to their profession, but a disgrace to humanity and the devil's most faithful factors. They corrupt the morals of their people, and hinder the spread of Religion in the world. Woe unto such, for they have followed the ways of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam. Their God is their belly, their glory is in their shame, and their only concern is about earthly things.

O ye Bishops, is not the time come to take cognizance of such men! must they still be suffered to defile those sacred robes with which they are clad, as a badge of their profession, and a mark of their high-calling? you will not

in this case be clear, in my opinion, at the great day of God. These men are one great cause of all the schisms and immoralities in the world, and cause the torrent of deism, libertinism, and enthusiasm, to flow more rapidly in the earth.

LASTLY, permit me just to observe, that many clergymen might better attend to their duty were it not for the disadvantages that attend them in point of accommodation; how is it practicable for the most pious and active clergyman to attend his duty as he ought, in various parts of this kingdom. Many country churches there are, to which belong no house, or worse than none, no small parcel of land for the support of a cow, no income, no accommodations. Surely, if in this life only, such preachers of the gospel have hope in Christ, they are undoubtedly of all men the most miserable. And even on this account, Methodists and others, gain an advantage over the established church.

O ye Bishops, is it nothing to you, that the case should be thus? are not ye concerned for the abject state of your younger brethren? ye ministers of State, is it nothing to you? ye magistrates and men of opulence is it nothing to you?

A large sum of money, it is said, is in the hands of the governors of the bounty of Queen Ann, which if properly disposed of, might be of great service to many of our churches.—If this be so, such as are guilty must bear the blame,

FINIS.